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ABSTRACT

The homeschooling movement has grown in popularity as evidenced by the involvement of an estimated 1.2 million students and cooperative programs offered by schools. There is however a sparsity of research dealing with the participation of homeschoolers in school counseling programs. The extension of services to homeschoolers would involve community outreach, could better enhance community relations and build partnerships that are beneficial to homeschoolers. This digest describes reasons for homeschooling, characteristics of families who homeschool, the status of public and home school relations, and ways professional school counselors can make positive connections with homeschoolers. (Contains 16 references.) (GCP)

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Professional School Counselors Can Make Positive Connections with Homeschoolers

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by

Gloria Dansby-Giles

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University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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ERIC CASS DIGEST

Professional School Counselors Can Make Positive Connections with Homeschoolers

Gloria Dansby-Giles

2002
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Introduction

The homeschooling movement has grown in popularity as evidenced by the involvement of an estimated 1.2 million students (Lyman, 1998) and cooperative programs offered by schools. Homeschoolers' contact with public schools has encompassed part-time enrollment, dual enrollment and participation in extracurricular activities such as sports (Angelis, 1998). Fager and Brewster (2000) documented homeschoolers' use of computer labs, on-line courses, chat rooms, e-mail and phone support from supervising teachers. There is, however, a sparsity of research dealing with the participation of homeschoolers in school counseling programs. This is an excellent opportunity for counseling professionals to reach a new population of students in need of counseling and guidance services. The extension of services to homeschoolers would involve community outreach, could better enhance community relations and build partnerships that are beneficial to homeschoolers.

This digest will describe reasons for homeschooling, characteristics of families who homeschool, the status of public and home school relations, and ways professional school counselors can make positive connections with homeschoolers.

Reasons for Homeschooling

Lyman (1998) offered the following reasons people choose homeschooling: religious values in education; worries over crime and lack of discipline in public schools; concern about the quality of education; and the belief that children are best educated by parents. Lange and Liu (1999), in a study of homeschooling in Minnesota, found similarly that "special needs of the children, educational philosophy, parenting style and religious and ethical beliefs" were factors in choosing to homeschool. McDowell (2000) offered a different perspective with an epidemiological approach to analyzing the incidents of violence on the homeschooling movement. She determined that the influence of homeschooling along with the negative factors associated with public schools multiplied the number of persons who participated in homeschooling. Kozlowski (1999) addressed reasons for homeschooling by superintendents and parents in Alabama. The superintendents reported that shielding children from adverse social factors and inculcating morals and values were the parents' most frequent reasons for homeschooling. The parents on the other hand stated "individual attention and raising confident, caring and well-rounded people" as their reasons.

Characteristics of Families Who Homeschool Their Children

Families who homeschool their children generally can be described as religious, conservative, college educated, middle-class, two parent, (Bielick and others 2001; Rudner 1999, Bauman 2001) and politically active (Lines, 2001). Bauman (2001) concluded that homeschooling families are most prevalent in rural and suburban areas of the West and tend to have one parent not in the labor force. Rudner (1999) revealed that about one-fourth of homeschooled students were being educated by a parent who was a certified teacher. In terms of achievement, Rudner (1999) found that about 25% of homeschoolers were performing at one or more grade levels above their peers in public and private schools.

Public Education and Homeschoolers

Public schools have long had connections with the homeschool community via services such as part-time enrollment and participation in student activities. A public school in Barnstable, Massachusetts helped to pioneer the concept of assistance to homeschool families as early as 1978. In addition, the Cupertino Union School District in California provided open enrollment/alternative education beginning in 1975 (Angelis, 1998). One notable public school system connecting with homeschoolers is the Federal Way School District in Washington (Fager and Brewster, 2000). The Federal Way School District instituted an Internet academy that provides instruction through on-line courses, chat rooms, e-mail and phone support from supervising district teachers. Homeschool students can attend courses but also have the option to enroll for all instruction on-line. Those without computer access can utilize a school district computer lab or computers at public libraries.

As school districts have opened their doors to homeschooled children in the areas of curricular and extracurricular activities, legal concerns have been raised with regard to the requests for services (Lines, 2001). Controversy has centered on the eligibility requirements for participation in sports programs. School counselors should be aware of the ways in which connections between public schools and the homeschool community continue to evolve.

Making Positive Connections with Homeschoolers

One of the primary reasons for building partnerships with the homeschooling population is to serve students, which is consistent with the public school mission to provide "quality educational experiences for all school-aged children" (Pearson, 1996). Other reasons include the requirements of state legislation, funding that may be available for serving homeschooled children as a result of state guidelines (Mayberry et al, 1995), and "maintaining positive working relationships with students who may eventually re-enroll in the school" (Lines, 1995). In rural settings, the appeal for school counseling services may be greater since alternative options for services may not be available (Sherwood, 1989).

Given the sparsity of research dedicated to the involvement of homeschooled children in school counseling programs, the following recommendations are offered. First, school counseling sponsored services such as college nights, career fairs, college admissions counseling, financial aid and scholarship information, standardized testing, test preparation sessions, access to Advanced Placement classes and other enrichment activities should be made available to the homeschooling population. In addition to these services, many school counseling programs offer computerized career development programs that could assist homeschooled students in identifying career fields and potential college majors. Not surprisingly this latter point is of interest to homeschoolers as many will seek admission to college (Angelis, 1998).

Second, as a strategy to further involve the home school population within school counseling programs, efforts can be made to include a home schooling advocate on school counseling advisory councils. Carney (1994) reported that a critical component of comprehensive competency-based guidance models is the advisory council that assists in the evaluation and enhancement of the school counseling program. These councils usually consist of a broad range of individuals and include representation from ethnic minority groups, persons with disabilities, and persons of various ages. A homeschooling representative would help keep the public school counselors in touch with the needs of homeschoolers.

Third, many school counseling programs list the types of services that they provide on a school district or school website. This practice is

beneficial to inform home school populations of the services offered. It also allows them to select the services that they desire. Publicizing school activities and programs in homeschooling resources would further encourage the involvement of homeschooled children.

Fourth, participation in school counseling programs could assist homeschoolers in obtaining letters of recommendation from school counselors. Since many of these students have to submit a detailed portfolio of experiences for college admissions in order to be recognized as a competitive applicant, the letters of recommendation from school counselors could prove to be useful (Ensign, 1997).

Fifth, counselors can provide homeschooling parents information on child development, student learning, curriculum planning, assessment and evaluation (Dahm, 1996). Other support services that would be beneficial are administering achievement tests and proctoring exams (Fager & Brewster, 2000).

A trend has been established for public schools to provide services to homeschoolers. As services are extended to this new and growing population, school counselors will be challenged to develop relationships and make positive connections with homeschoolers. These connections fit the mission of public education and also create relationships with students who may at some point become full-time clients on school counselors' caseloads.

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Dr. Gloria Dansby-Giles is a professor of counselor education at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi.

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